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On the cover:

*Photo of stained glass window in the HUC-JIR Chapel on the Cincinnati campus. The Alumni Service Window, which pictures the Jewish Chaplaincy insignia superimposed upon an American flag was dedicated on January 12–14, 1948. The inscription on the window reads: “In honor of our colleagues, students and alumni of the Hebrew Union College who served their country in two World Wars, 1917-18–1941-45.”*

*(Photograph taken by Amy Malventano)*

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With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the United States greatly increased the size of its armed forces. As part of that buildup, three American rabbinical schools instituted a joint military chaplaincy "draft" that continued until 1969. During that period, nearly four hundred rabbis served in all parts of the world. James Rudin describes his Air Force tour of duty in Japan and Korea in the 1960s and how it influenced his future rabbinic career. He also explores how the chaplaincy significantly impacted the Jewish community and helped shape its role within the general American society.

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after Shabbat and fulfilling the commandment to shoo the mother bird away that she not witness the taking of her young from the nest. Karff ignores the final stinging comment of this account uttered by apostate Elisha ben Abuya: “There is no justice and there is no judge.” Instead, Karff utilizes this Midrash as an opportunity to affirm a God who enables an individual to “discover the deepest meaning of our lives” (62); this subscribes to Martin Buber’s theology, “You need God in order to be, and God needs you for the very meaning of your life” (365). Karff interprets this as God’s “divine self-limitation.” This approach is further explained by Karff’s comment that “God limits the divine self in order to grant human creatures the dignity of real freedom, rather than be puppets on a divinely controlled string. God also limits his micromanaging of the universe by giving us dependable laws of nature.” This reviewer cannot imagine that the limited-God card can be of comfort to the parent of a child dying from an incurable disease.

In spite of a lack of careful editorial copy editing, this rich account of Karff’s life and career offers younger colleagues—perhaps those at the start of their careers—the benefit of being able to view the lifetime of a rabbi whose career focuses on the challenges and rewards of being called to sacred work. Rabbi Karff puts all the exultation and anguish of his calling into sharp perspective.

*Stephen S. Pearce, PhD, rabbi emeritus of Congregation Emanu-El of San Francisco, is author of Flash of Insight: Metaphor and Narrative in Therapy and coauthor, with Bishop William E. Swing and Father John P. Schlegel, of Building Wisdom’s House: A Book of Values for Our Time.*

**Lisa Moses Leff, *The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xii + 286 pp.**

In March 1959, Zosa Szajkowski (1911–1978), the scholar of French Jewish history, wrote to Jacob Rader Marcus, founder of the American Jewish Archives, on behalf of “a friend” looking to sell three historical documents for \$20 (around \$165 in 2016 dollars). When Marcus offered \$15, Szajkowski replied that his “friend” would accept it, but he asked

that Marcus send the check “on my name.” Marcus happily obliged, and asked Szajkowski’s “friend” to pass along similar material if he had any.<sup>1</sup> As Marcus would repeat only weeks later: “We are always in the market to buy, as long as the price is right.”<sup>2</sup> In July of that year, Szajkowski sent Marcus another package. “These documents dont [sic] belong to me and I was asked for them \$100,” he explained. This time, Marcus passed, leaving Szajkowski’s “friend” to peddle his wares elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> “These documents dont [sic] belong to me”—these words could not have been truer. As Lisa Moses Leff details in *The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust*, the documents, pamphlets, and pages trafficked by Szajkowski were the product of a decades-long career of theft in the archives.

In *The Archive Thief*, Leff traces Szajkowski’s career and exploits, from his fascination with books as a youth in Russian Poland to his final capture and suicide in New York. Following a brief biographical sketch and a consideration of Szajkowski’s blossoming career as a journalist and scholar in the 1930s as part of a circle of YIVO scholars in Paris led by Elias (Ilya) and Riva Tcherikower. Leff turns to the book’s primary subject: Beginning in 1940, after Szajkowski suffered a severe injury while serving in the French Foreign Legion, Szajkowski lived a double life, collecting historical material on the Jews of France both for his own research and also to provide materials to archives and libraries in the United States and, in later years, the state of Israel. Upon recovery, Szajkowski found himself in the south of France, where he secured manuscripts of the Jewish communities in Carpentras as well as research materials the Tcherikowers had left in Paris. Though he escaped to America, he reenlisted as a paratrooper in the American forces, enabling him to continue the fight against the Germans; it also allowed him to search for archives in Berlin at the war’s end. This early work may perhaps be construed as salvage, but at some point, it became outright theft. The book’s final chapters turn to his more explicitly criminal activities in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, leading to a dramatic denouement. When Szajkowski was caught red-handed in the *Archives départementales* in Strasbourg in 1961, he was allowed to flee after signing a confession but was convicted in absentia and effectively barred from returning to France. Nevertheless, he continued to steal. In 1978, Szajkowski was once again found stealing, this time from the archives of the New York Public Library. With his career totally ruined, he took his own life.



*The Archive Thief*, for which Leff was awarded the 2016 Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature, makes an important contribution in introducing the question of the history of archives within Jewish studies, a topic that deserves greater consideration. The academic study of archives is steeped in somewhat impenetrable theory and a now-sprawling secondary literature. Further, archives' special interest to the scholars who make use of them comes at a risk of navel-gazing. That is not to say that archives are uninteresting outside the rarefied world of scholarship, but a recognition of an inherent possibility that the topic could lead to insider baseball. Leff has written a book that will appeal to a broad audience, through intense focus on a fascinating figure and by sidestepping (though not ignoring) the often jargon-filled landscape of academic archival studies. Using Antoinette Burton's language of the "backstage of archives," Leff leverages a shorthand that at once gestures at the theoretical literature and makes the simple yet profound point that understanding how the archives have been shaped is crucial for those who wish to comprehend how the discipline of Jewish history has evolved. Leff makes archives personable through the character of Szajkowski and his dramatic story—one of theft, salvage, and the true home of the sources of history. It is unfortunate, then, that Leff has buried her argument and shows much restraint, perhaps limited by the clandestine nature of the topic at hand, in making clear statements about the nature, scope, and motives for Szajkowski's activities.

In sketching Szajkowski, Leff is careful to eschew terms of black and white. She proposes that in stealing files from French archives and selling them to self-defined Jewish ones, Szajkowski fundamentally transformed them: By bringing together these materials, which never would have been side by side in their natural habitat, Szajkowski removed the files from their French context and reconfigured them as a part of "Jewish" history. Szajkowski even created his own "archive" when he reorganized the files in his hotel room, blurring the lines between archivist and researcher (4, 12, 182–183). Leff also posits that Szajkowski catalyzed the field of French Jewish history, on the one hand making documents available to a budding group of mid-twentieth-century scholars in the United States, and on the other hand motivating French archivists to catalog their holdings as a means to determine the damage done (3). She hints that removing files was Szajkowski's way of making his research more efficient, only distinctive from contemporary scholars' methods in its ruthlessness (186).

Indeed, when scholars visit archives and libraries, we “take” notes, and now photographs. And Leff suggests that Szajkowski carried forth into the postwar era the tradition of the *zamlers*, or collectors, popularized by Simon Dubnow and the interwar YIVO. But whereas YIVO’s Marek Web acknowledged in 1980, two years after Szajkowski’s final crime, that the research institute must shift away from their longtime policy of “active collecting” and “campaigning” for records among a network of *zamlers*, Szajkowski held fast to his role, just as he looked nostalgically to an era of Diaspora nationalism.<sup>4</sup> In the end, though, Leff fails to tie all this together, leaving the reader with a tantalizing trail of crumbs pointing the way to the bigger picture.

Leff only delves into Szajkowski’s life as an “archive thief” in the book’s final fifty pages. Nevertheless, she grapples throughout with a fundamental tension, captured in the book’s very title, of whether Szajkowski’s work was theft or salvage. At first, it appears that Leff draws a line between “acceptable” theft during World War II and its immediate aftermath and more clear-cut criminal acts in later years. But she intimates that it was more complex, hinting that when Szajkowski asked YIVO in 1940 for funds to purchase documents from a “local Jew,” he was already working for personal gain (67). She notes that in postwar Berlin, Szajkowski was ripping pages from books and removing ownership stamps, later his signature (134). And she reveals that Szajkowski’s 1949 falling-out with Max Weinreich, director of YIVO in New York, was in part related to the disclosure that some of his wartime collecting had crossed an ethical line (144–145). Carefully placed questions bring the reader to consider when, precisely, Szajkowski began stealing, or at least compromising his moral compass. When he later cut pages from bound archival registers and purported to represent his “friend” the document dealer, was he breaking bad, or following an already established pattern? Rather than painting him as either rescuer or thief, as he’s been understood by the archives that he either provided or pilfered, Leff argued in a 2012 article that Szajkowski was simultaneously rescuer *and* thief.<sup>5</sup> In the book, this claim is a bit muddled. Perhaps the whole matter is meant to be a bit ambiguous, allowing the reader to come to her or his own conclusions. But in doing so, is the reader merely invited to once again try Szajkowski in absentia?

Szajkowski’s motives are also left ambiguous. Leff suggests that Szajkowski stole documents to keep them close at hand while writing and

then sold them after he was done—the equivalent of research photography in a world before handheld cameras, or students who sell books at the end of the semester (186). Leff emphasizes that collecting documents constituted Szajkowski's lifelong passion; she cites a young Szajkowski's efforts to raise money to buy books in an impoverished Polish shtetl and his later letters to Elias Tcherikower on the topic of collecting in which he wrote, "*I have to do it. I can't do otherwise*" (54; original emphasis). In this, she lends weight to the notion that they were "crimes of passion." Szajkowski was motivated by a sense of moral duty, Leff explains: at first, that files left in Vichy France would be lost; later, that his efforts were part of restitution; and finally, that in stealing and selling documents, he was receiving what should be his just deserts, as scholars should have been, in his view, better supported financially. The financial motive, however, is unclear. In 1961, Szajkowski made \$3,400 from selling documents (about \$27,000 in 2016 dollars), truly a significant addition to his YIVO salary, which was around \$5,500 in 1967 (equivalent to \$39,000 in 2016) (187). But as Leff indicates, Szajkowski led a frugal lifestyle, and she suggests that his salary was more than sufficient to support a family of three, leading the reader to question why the lucrative but illicit business attracted him. Leff leaves us with a vague image of a life denied, that of the respected middle-class scholar, in part because he lacked a university affiliation and in part because he believed the Jewish world had abandoned scholarship and limited it as a path to social mobility. Leff thus indicates that Szajkowski was embittered by the transformations of postwar Jewish life and the decline of the ideals of Diaspora nationalism. But if anything, his thefts from French archives and subsequent sales in the United States and Israel, like his decision to publish his later research in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew—but not in French—indicate his gravitation away from France toward these new epicenters.

In the end, the singular focus on the character of Zosa Szajkowski comes at the expense of the other parties involved. Szajkowski may have been an archive thief, but his story is not isolated. It is part of a broader era of postwar reconstruction and transformation of the archives of Jewish history. Leff does consider the buyers, but she doesn't get at the heart of the matter, which is that they were willing accomplices, even enablers as the exchange with Marcus demonstrates. The surreptitious nature of the whole affair and Szajkowski's efforts to cover his tracks means that the drama with which

Leff opens and closes the book, and which endows it with such potential and energy, casts a shadow over its remainder, where so much by definition remains in the shadows. Ultimately, *The Archive Thief* is a profoundly interesting character study that presents an open invitation to continue exploring the “backstage” of the development of archives and their impact and meaning for the emergence of Jewish studies as an academic discipline.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Zosa Szajkowski to Jacob Rader Marcus, 18 March 1959, Marcus to Szajkowski, 24 March 1959, Szajkowski to Marcus, 2 April 1959, Marcus to Szajkowski, 6 April 1959, MS-687, 98/3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob Rader Marcus to Zosa Szajkowski, 13 May 1959, MS-687, 98/3, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>3</sup>Zosa Szajkowski to Jacob Rader Marcus, 17 July 1959, Marcus to Szajkowski, 21 July 1959, MS-687 98/3, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>4</sup>Marek Web, “The YIVO Archives: 55 Years of Collecting,” 1 October 1980, YIVO RG 100, New York.

<sup>5</sup>Lisa Leff, “Rescue or Theft? Zosa Szajkowski and the Salvaging of French Jewish History after World War II,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 1–39.

**Adam D. Mendelsohn, ed., *By Dawn’s Early Light: Jewish Contributions to American Culture from the Nation’s Founding to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 2016), 330 pp.**

Recently, we have witnessed renewed interest in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Jewish experience in the United States. Important monographs by Tobias Brinkmann, Adam Mendelsohn, and Cornelia Wilhelm have contributed to the field’s knowledge of this pivotal period in American Jewish history. In particular, Mendelsohn’s book on Jewish immigrant socioeconomics and America’s garment industry won the 2014 National Jewish Book Award in American Jewish Studies and